



OFFICIAL SELECTION  
**UN CERTAIN REGARD**  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

# HARD LABOR

Written and Directed by JULIANA ROJAS & MARCO DUTRA  
Producers SARA SILVEIRA & MARIA IONESCU  
DEZENOVE SOM E IMAGENS



# CAST

Helena  
Otávio  
Paula  
Vanessa  
Inês  
Gilda

Helena Albergaria  
Marat Descartes  
Naloana Lima  
Marina Flores  
Lilian Blanc  
Gilda Nomacce

# SYNOPSIS

Young housewife Helena is on the verge of fulfilling a dream as she prepares to open her own business: a neighborhood grocery store.

She hires a maid, Paula, to take care of her house and daughter. But when her husband Otávio is suddenly fired from his job as an insurance executive, Helena is left to support the family alone.

As Otávio fails to find work and becomes increasingly alienated, business struggles to take off and the pressure on Helena mounts. To make things worse, she discovers that one of the building's brick walls seems to be crumbling. Helena begins to wonder if that may be the cause of all her problems.

**Brazil / 2011 / Color / 35mm / 1.85:1 / Portuguese / 99 min**

# CREW

Written and directed by	Juliana Rojas, Marco Dutra
Producer	DEZENOVE SOM E IMAGENS Maria Ionescu, Sara Silveira
Associate producer	Filmes do Caixote
Executive producer	Maria Ionescu
Line Producer	Ronald Kashima
Cinematographer	Matheus Rocha
Art Director	Fernando Zuccolotto
Editor	Caetano Gotardo
Sound engineer	Gabriela Cunha
Sound editing	Daniel Turini, Fernando Henna
Casting	Alice Wolfenson

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# ABOUT HARD LABOR

Hard Labor is the result of a partnership of over ten years. We met in our first year at film school and began working together a few months later on one of our first video exercises. Our assignment was to shoot the same sequence (“guy buys a book”), first with three shots and then with nine. Even in this small exercise there was already an element of horror present in our approach, though it was more like a joke at that time. Over the years, we continued our collaboration and co-directed The White Sheet, our first short film to be seen more widely.

Both in pre-production and on set, we don’t divide the work: both of us keep in close touch with the entire team and all of the actors. A lot of them are friends and long-time collaborators – we work within a collective called Filmes do Caixote. The majority of the cast and crew from Hard Labor had already worked with us on our short films, and that fact was reflected in the on-set dynamics. The ten years we have spent working together have sharpened our ability to understand each other’s wishes and help one another make them work inside a film. It’s very nice to be able to share doubts as well as desires on the set. The result is that the films we make don’t represent each of our voices separately, but our partnership, and that’s very rewarding.


Since we started making films, we have been trying to establish a dialogue with genre, horror and fantasy cinema. We’ve had a love for these forms since our childhood and they are not often explored in Brazilian cinema. We’re also interested in how genre can be used as a filter to discuss and enlighten other subjects, because our first interest as directors is the subject itself, more than one or another kind of style.

For Hard Labor, our first feature film, we sought to sharpen this perspective by narrating a story about how work – or the lack of it – can deeply affect the family as well as other personal relationships. A story with its own particular macabre touches that have their roots in the daily lives and domestic universes of the characters. We wanted to explore the way the family is affected when suddenly, a role reversal happens and overturns the established structure.

What we seek out is the way the subject relates to its own morbid components, rather than simply applying the clichés of horror cinema to our movies. That doesn’t mean we don’t like the conventions of the genre, we just try to find a way to use them that makes sense for the stories we want to tell. That’s also the case in Hard Labor. Helena’s breakdown finds its meaning in the suspense elements rather than the other way around.

To give an example, we first asked ourselves “Do we need a soundtrack at all to tell this story?” rather than thinking from the beginning: “We have to have a scary soundtrack.” In our short film The White Sheet, there’s a scene with a woman taking care of her dead baby in a dimly lit room. The only sound comes from a children’s movie on the TV set. In the same film, a kitchen knife briefly appears in the hands of the protagonist. It lasts only one second, but for us it impregnates her actions in the film as a whole. That kind of atmosphere is one we relate to the horror genre, though it’s not what is commonly understood as “horror cinema.”



A woman with dark hair, wearing a blue scarf and a grey jacket, is looking upwards with a contemplative expression. She is standing in a room with tall, empty metal shelves in the background. The lighting is dim and moody, with some light reflecting off the shelves and the woman's face. The overall atmosphere is one of quiet reflection or perhaps a sense of longing or aspiration.

We also wanted to tell a story about the importance of work and economic power in society, through a portrait of middle class reality in Latin America. Brazil is one of the fastest growing economies in the world, though that wasn't necessarily on our minds as a direct source of inspiration. But it is reflected in Helena's sudden decision to make an investment and become an entrepreneur. On the other hand, Paula, the maid, represents an aspect of modern day Brazil that has been pretty much the same for a long time. Paula and Helena maintain a kind of informal yet extremely hierarchical working relationship that's very typical here in Brazil. It's part of the heritage from our era of slavery, which ended very late in Brazil, in 1888. At the same time, the themes of unemployment, entrepreneurship and women becoming the head of household are very common not only in Brazil but also in other big cities around the world like Paris, Tokyo, or Mexico City to name a few.

We felt that the most dramatic moments in *Hard Labor* should come mainly from the economic and power relationships between the characters. That's apparent in the scenes depicting the relations between employer and employee, but it's also present in the scenes that take place within the family. If there is in fact a wall that separates personal and work relationships, it's a barrier that's not so solid. The result, we hope, is a film that disturbs not only through its approach to the life of a middle class family in crisis, but also by the morbid atmosphere that surrounds all of the characters. There is something frightening about each of their daily lives, their worries and aspirations..

## JULIANA ROJAS & MARCO DUTRA

Juliana Rojas, 29, and Marco Dutra, 31, studied at the São Paulo University Film School. Their graduation short film *THE WHITE SHEET* (O LENÇOL BRANCO) was shown at festivals around the world, including Cannes Cinéfondation in 2005. Their second short *A STEM* (UM RAMO) was selected for the Cannes Critics' Week in 2007, and won the Kodak Discovery Award for Best Short Film, having received comparisons to the work of Alfred Hitchcock and David Cronenberg. They also directed the award winning short films *CONCERT NUMBER THREE* (CONCERTO NÚMERO TRÊS), *DRESSED* (VESTIDA) and *THE SHADOWS* (AS SOMBRAS). Juliana Rojas and Marco Dutra also work as screenwriters and editors. Both are members of Filmes do Caixote, a group of young directors from São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro producing collectively. *HARD LABOR* is their first feature film.

## DEZENOVE SOM E IMAGENS

Dezenove Som e Imagens was founded in 1991 by filmmaker Carlos Reichenbach and producer Sara Silveira in partnership with producer Maria Ionescu. The company has the intent of producing feature-length and short films by independent filmmakers for the national and international market. It has produced or co-produced, including those with the participation of other countries, films that have consolidated the company as one of the most consistent producers of Brazilian movies.





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